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On the basis of a study of the language of 22 black children in a rural county of northern Florida, the author states that apart from geographical dialects, there are two "genera" of English: Black (BE) and White (WE). Within each of these genera there are two varieties: Educated and Uneducated. These are further defined by distinguishing features into "registers" which the author characterizes as "School" and "Nonschool", each of which may include more than one style. Most studies which have characterized Child BE as deficient have dealt only with the school registers. The nonschool register is characterized by longer utterances, more rapid speech, lower pitch, less stress, inventive and playful use of words, and greater variety of content. Lack of suitable instructional material adapted to the phonology of Child BE speakers has hampered teaching of reading. The author finds "that Black and White English differ principally in phonology. The base component of Child BE should not differ appreciably from that of Child WE." A probable phoneme inventory and a set of ordered rules are given with examples showing some possible relationships between Child BE and standard urban WE. (MK)

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A Sociolinguistic Consideration of the Black English of Children in Northern Florida

Susan H. Houston

Delivered to the Forty-Third Annual Meeting of
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December 29, 1968

Nonstandard English, especially those varieties spoken by socalled disadvantaged children, has generally been examined by recent researchers in two main ways. Linguistic attention has naturally concentrated on descriptions of these forms of language from a dialect-atlas or a technical linguistic viewpoint; work in other fields, chiefly education and social science, has been oriented toward study of these children's communicative problems and putative linguistic and cognitive deficiencies. Since linguists have only relatively lately become involved with dialect studies, the majority of extant examinations of the language of disadvantaged children have been undertaken without much underlying linguistic sophistication. But both viewpoints are useful and can be combined. It is thus the intent of the present paper to synthesize the linguistic and the social-science approaches to this topic, in what is hoped may prove a blending of techniques helpful both to technical linguists and to educators working with dialect-contact situations.

The present study is a pilot investigation of the language of children in one county of rural Northern Florida, that which I call Southville County. The research was carried out under the auspices of the Southeastern Education Laboratory in Atlanta, a regional lab of the Office of Education; the report

AL 001 638

was originally designed to provide descriptive information on which to base linguistic retraining or 'remediation' programs. The children worked with are between the ages of 9 and 12, with a median age of about 11; there were 22 of them, of whom 5 were boys, and all are black. The variety of language they speak is what I term Uneducated Child Black English. In order to explain this nomenclature, a few definitory remarks will be necessary.

The form of language which I have called Black English would probably be traditionally termed a dialect. However, this term is used in a number of senses, some of them even pejorative, and therefore is ambiguous. I use the term 'dialect' to refer to regional variants of language only, rather than social, situational or racial linguistic types. In this sense, Black English and White English are not dialects, although to be sure they have dialects or alternative forms characteristic of geographic areas. Instead, they are <u>genera</u> of American English: Black English is a genus of English, and so is White English. The small contribution this may make to the proliferation of terminology in our field seems compensated for by the concomitant reduction in ambiguity.

In this study and elsewhere, we presume that Black English and White English can be regarded as separate entities, although this is a working hypothesis rather than a conclusion. It is based on the apparent fact that a number of linguistic characteristics appear exclusively in one or the other genus. The sociolinguistic situation is comparable to the linguistic one: there are perceptual differences between these genera in most or all regions of the U.S., such that a speaker, black or white, of a particular region can usually, although not always, identify another speaker of that region as black or white on the basis of speech alone; in one study, conducted by Dr. Roger Shuy of the Center for Applied Linguistics, respondents were able to make this judgment with about

80% accuracy. That this is not infallible is not especially significant: Black English and White English subsume different ranges of linguistic features, even though the ranges may overlap. For instance, the difference between Black and White English in the South happens to be far less than in the North, due to demographic and historical linguistic facts, but even there the difference is manifest and perceptible; and it is of course inaccurate to state that Black English is equivalent to general Southern English.

You will recall that I spoke of the language of my target children as Uneducated Child Black English. Now, both genera of English may be considered as having two subspecies, which may be called Educated and Uneducated as convenient labels. Educated varieties of language are those spoken by educated, often urban speakers of the relevant genus, and accorded prestige and maximum acceptance in typical educated and integrated environments. Both Educated Black English and Educated White English are markedly different from their corresponding Uneducated varieties. We might note too that it is the Uneducated variant of language, Black or White, which serves as a hindrance to educational, social, economic and other success; and that it should be the goal of linguistic remediation programs to make child speakers of Uneducated White English into speakers of Educated White English, and to make child speakers of Uneducated Black English into speakers of Educated Black English.

A final term to be explained here is 'register.' As we use it, a register consists in a range of styles of language, which have in common their appropriateness to a given situation or environment. Register is thus a broader concept than style. For example, the children in this study speak differently with their friends and family than they do in school, as will be discussed subsequently. They have, in other words, a School register and a Nonschool register. Within either there may be much variation in actual features of language, or

even several distinct styles, but each can nevertheless be considered as one register because there are features peculiar to this situation and no other. Characteristic features of a register are extralinguistic and behavioral as well as purely linguistic.

The data on which this study is based consists in about 25 hours of taped material, culled from some three times this much field observation. It was collected during field sessions originally intended as one to two hours each, with from one to four children per session. However, the actual recording circumstances were changed drastically, for a reason which has importance for the sociolinguistic aspects of Child Black English studies.

Prior to this project, I viewed a number of videotapes of Southeastern children in school settings in order to become familiar with their language. All these tapes were characterised by a distinctive set of linguistic and non-linguistic features which I tentatively labeled as the School register, since they did not resemble natural language of children of this age. Utterances in this register are quite short; rate of speech is slower than in the Nonschool register; the prevalence of strong stress and midhigh and high pitch is increased. In addition, the content expressed in this register is likely to be limited and nonrevelatory of the child speaker's personality and feelings.

In the early recording sessions in the present study, it became clear that the children were speaking in this same School register. Since this was a definite impediment to the gathering of free-text material or in fact of any quantity of data whatever, I decided to elicit the Nonschool register if possible. One way of doing this turned out to be getting them together in larger, unstructured and openended group sessions. In addition, use of the Nonschool register was encouraged by general nonthreatening behavior on the part of the investigator,

which included allowing the children to say and record anything they chose; lack of formal scheduling or routine; letting the children come and go as they pleased; and other reinforcements of behavioral concomitants of the Nonschool register in the expectation that this would lead to use of this register, as it did.

The reason register is important to us is that it accounts for many common observations on the language of the disadvantaged or minority child. Now, the School register is used with a variety of persons and in a variety of situations not all of which involve school per se--in general it is likely to be used with adults and persons in authority over the children and with persons not well known to them, especially if much older and white; and in situations which are formal and school-like, threatening to the children, or in which their behavior is clearly being observed for any reason. It may also be used in any situation involving gross change in routine. It is obvious that most studies and research projects with which these children come into contact do involve these circumstances--including, of course, the present study, in which they were being investigated by an unknown adult white female teacher who additionally speaks a different dialect, genus and species of language from them. At any rate, the School register is the form of language almost certain to be observed by outside researchers or teachers studying Child Black English. Bearing in mind the very limiting formal and contentive characteristics of this register, one can hypothesize that it is largely responsible for the frequent statement that socalled disadvantaged children are linguistically and perhaps cognitively deficient, an impression--although mistaken--that this register does at first give the unprepared observer. It is probable that both the children and their teachers regard the School register as the children's 'best' language, since it seems to represent careful speech. But the children use the Nonschool register with most ease, naturalness of expression and fluency.

Once the Nonschool register is perceived, the picture of the children's communicative abilities changes completely. Far from being nonverbal, they are, as the linguist might well expect, beautifully creative and imaginative in their use of language. The children I studied engaged in constant verbal play, storytelling and language games, some of them gratifyingly consistent with traditions of verbal art and folklore--as for instance their ritualized insult game. They value linguistic creativity in each other highly, and many have developed remarkable talent in spontaneous narrative and improvisation on traditional tales. Southville County children live in a rural setting, and are furthermore usually engaged in some useful task or other such as working in the fields or tending small siblings; these factors, resulting in both the lack of time to play and the lack of material playthings, contribute to the joy they find in the creative use of language and their readiness to use words as toys.

One of the few areas in which reports of nonfluency are accurate or even understated occurs within the School register, however, and this is in reading. The oral reading style used by all child speakers of Uneducated Black English whom I observed is what has been termed 'word calling,' or reading each word in a sentence with strong stress, high pitch and basic list intonation as though it were written in a foreign language. Although oral reading in this manner apparently does not necessarily preclude understanding of the text, it does not contribute either to reading speed or to the reader's enjoyment of the task, and strikes the observer as appalling. Probably the method by which the children learn to read is partly at fault; this is usually the sight-reading or whole-word method, rather than one based on phonics or other phonological segmentation. However, the whole-word method effectively prevents rational attack on newly enconntered lexicon; and since much of the

lexicon the children will encounter outside of school--for example, in newspapers--is in fact new to them, the method in the aggregate does not work. On the other hand, standard phonologically-oriented methods of teaching reading, including both phonics and newer techniques such as the international teaching alphabet, are based on Educated Northern White English, which has a different phonology from that of these children. There is no phonological reading-instruction method adapted to the needs of the Child Black English speaker, and it is beyond the capabilities of the average language arts teacher in the rural South to devise one, so the problem remains unsolved. There are, of course, further contributory factors in the formation of the reading style; these include the unreal nature of reading-instructional material, which tends in the Southeastern school to be of the Dick-and-Jane variety, as well as the unawareness on the part of teachers that the children's unnatural oral-reading style is not universal and should not be condoned. This is clearly a problem, or series of problems, deserving of much further study.

We have seen so far that the frequent reports of disadvantaged children's nonverbalness may well stem from observation of only the School register. Register also enters into another often misunderstood factor of Black English, namely that often termed bidialectism. By this is generally meant control by black speakers of both Black and White English. Although this is the goal of most remedial language programs which work with child Black English speakers, bidialectism in this sense does not seem to exist. Instead, the linguistic switching mistaken for it might better be called biregistralism, or the possession of two or more linguistic registers. This is common among speakers of Uneducated Black and possibly also Uneducated White English. But both registers controlled by a single speaker presumably always belong to the same linguistic genus; that is,

both are either Black English or White English. Remedial linguistic programs achieve only building-up of the School register, and it is this register to which new forms are added and phonological changes made. But typically, neither register of the Uneducated Black English speaker represents a good approximation to Educated Black English--in which the distinction between registers is either lessened or nonexistent.

In regard to linguistic analysis of Child Black English in Florida, a major problem of dialect and genus research crops up here too--namely, the assignment of particular features to phonology or to syntax. For example, educators of child Black English speakers often comment on the children's lack of regular past tense forms or noun plurals, purportedly features of the children's syntax. However, such items may also be treated on the phonological level: to over-simplify, one can say that regular past tense markers do not exist in Child Black English; or else, that final stops which appear in White English do not appear in Black English. The two explanations do the same thing in regard to past tense; the choice between them is made on the grounds of their relative generality in the language as a whole and the importance of their grammatical claims. There are almost always unambiguous decision procedures in such cases. It is preferable all other things being equal to treat such differences between Black and White English as phonological where possible. Variants of a language are expected to differ in surface rather than in base structure; phonological divergence is a less sweeping claim than syntactic. One would want to see too whether a few very general phonological rules might solve not only the problem in question but also other items of a dubious status. Also, further evidence frequently decides the issue--for instance, there happens to <u>be</u> a marked past tense in Child Black English, appearing with strong verbs, 'have' and 'be' and

so forth, as well, occasionally, as with regularly marked verbs in the School register, where overcorrection reduces the number of simplified consonant clusters. In fact it is the conclusion of this study that Black and White English differ principally in phonology; so far, few major morphosyntactic differences between the two have appeared. A full description of the base component of Child Black English should not differ appreciably from that of Child White English.

On the handout appear some preliminary indications of the relationships between Child Black English of Northern Florida and some standard Educated Urban White English, presumably that found in Kenyon and Knotts (A pronouncing dictionary of American English, 1953) or Webster III. There are two main reasons for preparing the data in this way. First, this study was limited by the exigencies of consultantship arrangements and child availability, and this format required somewhat less mass data than a full description of the genus. Too, it represents applied rather than basic research, designed to be applicable to language and communication programs being run with Southville County children--and the aims of such programs are to seek out and destroy the differences between Child Black and Adult White English, not a method, by the way, which I advocate.

Several comments on the rules may be helpful. In the first place, they are ordered, although this is necessary mainly to deal with 'R,' the reduction dummy. Also, the rules are represented as processes, namely those by which the Child Black English of Florida is derived from standard White English. Now it is of course not accurate to suggest that [prg] becomes [pɪɪg] in Child Black English: it does not become this but is merely so realized. This form of description was chosen for convenience, and is not meant to suggest, for example, that Southern black children have standard White phonology underlying their own, which seems rather dubious. It should be noted too that the rules

are an account of performance, not of competence, on which they form some sort of overlay. The effect of this is that most of the rules are optional, although some are more optional than others. When they are not applied, the resulting phonology tends to approximate that of standard Southern White English. It is not yet known what the conditions of optionality are, although they are clearly situational rather than formal and may exemplify some kind of style-switching within registers. The register described by the rules, by the way, is the Nonschool.

Finally, I should explain that the notational system in which the rules appear is more or less standard Smith-Trager (Trager, G.L., & Smith, H.L., An outline of English structure, 1957), with one major exception, as follows. The phonological nature of Southern Child Black English is such that there is no completely satisfactory way to indicate its vowel phonemes. I did not use distinctive feature notation both for the sake of wider readability and also because it presumes more data on this form of language than is now available. On the other hand, the Smith-Trager representation of tense vowels as the corresponding lax vowel plus a glide does not tell the whole phonetic or phonemic story of the language, In #1, Section One on the handout, you will see that the realization of the word 'eggs' in Child Black English lacks a high front glide after the first vowel. The word can be pronounced with such a glide, but this is simply a different pronunciation and one which is characteristic of a different dialect area. If there is a rise before the schwa in this word, acoustically speaking, it is not significant: the glide is better conceptualized as straight retraction toward central position, a very common glide pattern in this form of language. Since the schwa or barred i in #1 and 2 on the handout is phonemically a central glide of varying character rather than a full vowel, I have represented it by the

cover symbol /h/, so that 'eggs' is transcribed phonemically as in #3, and 'pig,' as in #4. This is merely a convention; were the word 'eggs' pronounced with a lax instead of a tense vowel, it would have been transcribed as in #5.

You will note that the rules are phonological only. So far only four major syntactic differences between Child Black and standard White English have appeared: first, Black English in socalled Wh-questions does not invert word order or add a do-transformation before forming the question; thus instead of, e.g., 'Why did he say that?' Black English will have 'Why he said that?', which may be phonologically manifested as in #6 on the handout. Second, in negation, forms of 'have' or 'be' followed by a negative become 'ain't' and the socalled double negative is standard usage. Third, the children I studied all seem to omit the verb Be in all present tense forms, although using it in other tense sequences; forms such as 'Why he be here?' do not appear in my data, although more research on this is needed, and it may be that such forms are characteristic only of certain dialects of Black English. Finally, the children tend to use pleonastic pronouns in such constructions as, 'My brother he at school.' Further syntax is more or less as expected from children of this age; it includes use of noun clauses, a full tense system, descriptive adjectives and so forth. This language is of course in no way impoverished or pidginized, so that, as one need hardly add, teaching methods such as those employed in English as a Foreign Language programs are not appropriate in 'correcting' it.

In conclusion, the attempt of this study was to give an account of the language and communication of Child Black English speakers in Southville County, Florida, from as eclectic a viewpoint as possible. The study was unfortunately if necessarily brief and cannot approach inclusivity; but I hope it may help to dispel some current misconceptions connected with the sociolinguistic and psycho-linguistic functioning of Child Black English, and to suggest avenues for further explorations.

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Handout

I. Examples

(1) 'eggs' = [eəgz]

not *[ejəgz]

*[ɛəgz]

(2) 'pig' = [piɨg]

not *[pijɨg]

*[pɪɨg]

(3) 'eggs' = /eyhgz/

(4) 'pig' = /piyhg/

(5) *'eggs' [ɛəgz] = /ehgz/

(6) /hwa hiy sey dæh/

Phonology of CBE/Fla

Phones

p	t̪	t	k	ʔ
b	d̪	d	g	
f		θ		h
v		ð		
		s ʃˢ ʃ		
		z ʒ		
m		n	ŋ	
	l̪	l r		
w		j		
i		u		
ɪ	ɨ	ʊ̈ ʊ		
e		o		
ɛ	ɘ ɛ˞ ʌ	ɔ		
æ	a	ɑ ɒ		

(Note: CBE/Fla also has nasal vowels [Ṽ])

Probable inventory of phonemes

p	t	k	
b	d	g	
f	θ		h
v	ð		
	s š č		
	z ž ǰ		
m	n	ŋ	
	l r		
w	y		
i		u	
e	ə	o ɔ	
æ	a	ɑ	

Pitch levels: 1 2 3 4 5 (1 is low; 2, mid-low; 3, mid; 4, hi-mid; 5, hi)

Clause terminals: ↘ ↗ ↘ ↗ →

Some Phonological Rules of CBE/Fla

Rule		Examples
1. X ə š X → X e š X	X any seq.	1. brəš → breš, həš → heš
2. # (C) V (C) → (C) V R (C)	V = -tense	2. (diphthongization)
3. V r X → V R X	V any V or VR, X any/no seq.	3. (r-loss)
4. V l (C) # X → V R (C) # X	X = C or ∅, C any C or CC	4. (l-loss)
(rare) 5. # [t d] r → # [k g] r		5. driym → griym, trəbəl → krəbəl
6. X V C C # → X V C #	recurs <u>once</u>	6. (reduction of clusters) kihst → kihs, dahmz → dahm
7. C V [t d] V X → C V ʔ V X		7. kudən → kuʔən
8. X V N X # Y → X Ṽ R X # Y Opt for Y = V / N # ___ Ob for Y = {C / N # ___ any or no seq. / C # ___ }	X any/no seq., N any nasal, V any V or V + glide	8. (loss of nasal) eyn → ẽỹ ('ain't') brawn → brãw̃
9. X [s z] ez]$_{plur}$ # → X s #		9. hawzəz → haws, bušəz → bus̆

Rule		Examples
10. # (C_1) V C_2 # → # (C_1) V R #	C_1 any C, C_2 = p t k	10. kæht → kæh, leyht → leyh
11. # C ay (C) → # C a R (C)	C any cons.	11. tray → tra:(h)
(rare)12. V C_1 # C_2 → V R # C_2	V any vowel (+ glide) C_1 = +voice, +strid C_2 = +sonorant	12. pliyz liyv → pliy liyv
(rare)13. X V [s z] # C → X V R # C		13. kihs → kih
14. # C V (h) R # → C ow R	V = +back, -lo, +round	14. šuh → šow, floh → flow
15. V R R X → V R X		
16. R → (:) h / V_1 ___ ø / V_2 ___ g___	V_1 = i e æ a ɔ V_2 = ə g = y w h	
17. X_1 V h X_2 → X_1 V y h X_2	V = i e, X_1 = any/no seq., X_2 = any seq.	18. ehg → eyhg
18. X V h ə → X V ə		
(rare)19. V # → V ʔ #		

20. Phonetic interpretation of /h/:

i + h = [iɨ]

e + h = [ɛə]

a + h = [aə] (occasionally [aɨ])

æ + h = [æə] (or rarely [æɨ])

ey + h = [eə]

iy + h = [iɨ]

ɔ + h = [ɔə]

ɑ + h = [ɑə]